

# UNESCO

Welcome Remarks

Delivered By

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On the occasion of the

Launch of Coleccion Aruba

*5:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m. ,Thursday, 28 September 2023*

*Hyatt Hotel, Oranjestad, Aruba*

The Hon. Ms. Evelyne Wever-Croes, Prime Minister of Aruba,  
The Hon. Ms. Xiomara Madura, Minister of Finance & Culture,  
Ministers of Government, Parliamentarians and other Dignitaries,  
Innovators, Creators and Partners of Coleccion.aw,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish you each a happy International Day for Universal Access to Information!

I am deeply honored to be with you today, as a representative of UNESCO and on my behalf, to participate in the launch of Coleccion Aruba.

My inaugural visit to Aruba has been a revelation, I have been captivated by its natural beauty and the exceptional warmth and hospitality of its people. I am genuinely touched by the experience and look forward to the day when my family can also visit Aruba and together we can leisurely explore the island.

Today, I wish to underscore the profound significance of the ***International Day for Universal Access to Information***, celebrated not only here in Aruba but across the globe.

### **My Personal Connection to the Day**

The 28th of September is a day that symbolizes our unwavering commitment to access to information, a fundamental human right, which is critical for informed decision-making, and the realization of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is also a day that holds a special place in my heart, as I was closely involved in the internal processes and Member States discussions that led to the establishment of the International Day for Universal Access to Information at UNESCO and the subsequent proclamation by the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly.

### **The Importance of Access to Information**

Access to information is more than a mere commodity; it stands as the cornerstone of democracy and is a fundamental human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The International Day for Universal Access to Information serves as a poignant reminder that safeguarding this right for all is vital to preserving our fundamental freedoms.

In today's digital age, universal access to information assumes unparalleled importance. It empowers individuals to make informed choices, exercise their rights, and actively participate in democratic processes. Without access to information, citizens are disempowered, and democracy wanes.

Furthermore, universal access to information plays a pivotal role in promoting better decision-making. In an interconnected world where decisions carry global consequences, access to reliable information is the linchpin for positive outcomes, be it addressing climate change, public health crises, or promoting economic development.

### **Access to Information and the SDGs**

This day supports the global commitment to the 2030 SDGs, a global call to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all. Universal access to information stands as the keystone of this ambitious agenda. It enables us to monitor progress, share best practices, and mobilize resources

effectively. It embodies and is key to realizing the SDGs' principle of leaving no one behind.

### **Online Spaces and Access to Information**

This year's theme, "The importance of online spaces for access to information," acquires heightened significance, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic underscored the critical role of online spaces in ensuring universal access to timely, accurate, and diverse information. These spaces are not just communication tools; they are lifelines, safeguarding public health, education, work, and overall societal well-being.

Yet, we must confront a disconcerting reality: some governments persist in employing internet shutdowns to intentionally disrupt access to online information.

Research indicates that between 2016 and 2023, there were 1,198 internet shutdowns in 74 countries, with 187 shutdowns occurring in 2022 alone. These disruptions not only hinder access to information but also deny citizens access to government services which increasingly are provided digitally. Furthermore, these shutdowns can prevent access to information that could keep the public safe in times of protests, crisis and conflict; the very time when most shutdown occur.

### **Challenges of Internet Shutdowns**

Internet shutdowns represent a highly intrusive and preemptive form of censorship that contradicts international standards. While some shutdowns are implemented to counter incitement to violence and online hate speech, it is evident that more nuanced and proportionate responses are imperative to avoid the stifling of democratic spaces. In this regard, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has provided a six-step guide for assessing this complex issue.

Through the International Day for Universal Access UNESCO is bringing attention to this critical issue. Using a process of multi-stakeholder dialogue, UNESCO has been diligently developing guidelines for regulating digital platforms that are aligned with human rights standards. I extend a heartfelt invitation to each of you to actively engage and contribute to this vital work.

## **ColeccionAruba.aw and the Preservation of Documentary Heritage**

Today, the International Day for Universal Access to Information is an especially appropriate and auspicious day for launching Coleccion.aw. The preservation of documentary heritage plays an indispensable role in enhancing access to information through several key avenues, including:

1. **Cultural Continuity:** The preservation of historical records is instrumental in maintaining cultural continuity. It grants future generations access to their roots and historical context, fostering a profound understanding of their heritage.
2. **Knowledge Preservation:** Documentary heritage encapsulate knowledge that is pivotal in understanding both our past and our present. The documents in Coleccion Aruba reflect capture events and periods that have indelibly shaped Aruba's development and have undoubtedly influenced the global landscape. ColeccionAruba.aw ensures that this knowledge persists and remains accessible to all.
3. **Educational Enrichment:** Access to historical records can enrich educational curricula, offering invaluable insights into how Aruba has influenced the arts, architecture and a multitude of fields in-country and beyond. This further cements Aruba's contribution and position in the global landscape;
4. **Fostering Accountability:** Historical documents have, time and again, held governments and institutions accountable for their actions. Access to these records empowers transparency, upholds truth, and ensures justice.
5. **Safeguarding Against Crises:** Digitizing and widely disseminating Aruba's records proactively safeguards them against potential future crises.
6. **Collaborative Efforts:** ColeccionAruba.aw draws from diverse sources, epitomizing the spirit of collaboration, the sharing of best practices, resources, and expertise, both nationally and across borders.

By making its collections accessible worldwide, fostering education, cooperation, accountability, and cultural continuity, ColeccionAruba.aw makes a unique and invaluable contribution to universal access to information. It enriches our understanding of Aruba's influence on regional

and global culture, history, and the present. Furthermore, it offers an inspiring model that I trust other Caribbean countries will aim to emulate.

### **Conclusion**

So, universal access to information is not merely an individual endeavor but a shared responsibility. As we commemorate this significant day, let us recommit ourselves to transparency, openness, and the unimpeded flow of information. Let us harness the power of information to advance human rights, drive better decision-making, and expedite progress toward the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Together, we can forge a brighter future for all, where access to information and knowledge empowers each of us to reach our full potential and contribute meaningfully to our societies.

Thank you for this opportunity and for your kind attention.